

[When Not Playing it Safe Pays Off](#)*My Family's Experiment in Extreme Schooling*, by Clifford Levy

This memoir by an American correspondent stationed in Moscow narrates the story of a bold, risky educational choice. The writer decides to place his young children in an independent Russian progressive school as opposed to a bilingual or international one. The school is run by its eccentric, anti-authoritarian founder, whose school, like our charters, must conform to some state standards even while it simultaneously challenges the orthodoxies of Russian education. After a painful, fearful start, these children from Park Slope, Brooklyn, become fluent in Russian, excel and thrive. The article works on us at many levels. We find out something about the vicissitudes of cultural and foreign language immersion, about the vitality of an alternative school fighting prevailing orthodoxies, reminiscent of Dewey or Paolo Freire; and we are offered a window into educational experiments in countries other than our own. The parent body will be somewhat familiar, the pedagogy less so but offering some techniques readers may not have considered. What risks should parents be willing to take when everything urges us to play it safe?

Peter Herzberg, The Brearley School, NY

New York Times Magazine, September 2011

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ARTICLES, BLOGS, AND OTHER MEDIA

[A Teacher Finds Good in Testing](#)

Teachers' Vital Mission

[Are Standardized Testing and Great Teaching Really Incompatible?](#)*A Teacher Finds Good In Testing*, by Ama Nyamekye

(note to readers: only opens fully to subscribers)

Teachers' Vital Mission, by Todd R. Nelson

The title of the first article above may make many independent school educators shudder. Can there be such a thing as a wise use of standardized testing? We have been conditioned to think that testing misses the point of education. Todd Nelson claims in the second article that development of souls takes time, contact, labor, struggle, and guidance-teachers' work. Amid the clamor for accountability and standards, we may be missing the simple eloquence of the teacher-student relationship. Ama Nyamekye, in her *Ed Week* article about testing, would not disagree. Nonetheless, in recounting her resistance to testing in her own classroom, she finally confesses she starts to use it wisely by having tests help her fill holes in her curriculum and avoid assessments of student learning that are flawed and biased. In the busy opening months of school, read these two short articles; they will only take a few minutes. Although taken together, the ideas seem incompatible, each cries out eloquently for great teaching that touches the souls of children and shapes their intellectual cognition with equal fervor.

Bruce Shaw, Principal, Bruce A. Shaw Consulting LLC, Essex, Ma.

Philly.com, September 2011*Education Week*, August 2011[The AMERICAN SCHOLAR](#)[Affirmative Action and Inaction Revisited](#)*Affirmative Inaction*, by William M. Chace*An Elite Take on Affirmative Action*, by Mark Bauerlein

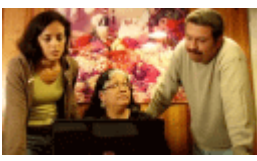
William Chace's winter 2011 article, "Affirmative Inaction", in *The American Scholar*, re-enacts a familiar, controversial and unresolved discussion. This affirmative action debate in some independent schools, colleges and universities has long been a consideration in setting recruitment and entrance policies. Chace argues that, particularly in private institutions, there is both responsibility and historically proven benefit in seeing admissions as an opportunity to act with a vigilance (and with private money) to augment the promise in the lives of the next generation of American young people. The ensuing response from, among others, Mark Bauerlein in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (May, 2011), posits a cogent answer to Chace, arguing against admissions policies that grant preferential treatment to certain racial groups. The article and the response to it matter. They speak to decisions at the heart of what a school values and how it enacts its beliefs.

Elizabeth Morley, The Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study, University of Toronto Canada

The American Scholar, Winter 2011*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 2011[What if the Secret to Success is Failure?](#)[True Grit](#)*What if the Secret to Success is Failure*, by Paul Tough

According to Paul Tough, two very different schools serving two very different populations share the same challenge: "the question of whether and how schools should impart good character." At Riverdale Country School, then, Headmaster Dominic Randolph wonders restlessly if independent schools are helping students understand and overcome their "shortcomings." David Levin, co-founder of the KIPP charter schools, meanwhile, is trying to remain optimistic in the face of recent college graduation statistics of KIPP's first graduating class. The article almost guarantees to call everyone from the local barber to the teachers making the best uses of the couches in the faculty room - into the conversation. It features appearances by Ed-gods like Martin Seligman and Angela Duckworth while exploring intellect-grabbing fodder like the "grit scale" and the difference between "moral character" (i.e. fairness, generosity and Gandhi) and "performance character" (i.e. diligence, perseverance and Steve Jobs). Students of change management should dive in, too - the article provides glimpses of the kinds of visionary leadership styles needed to advance an agenda as provocative and divisive as character education - regardless of the school.

Stephen J. Valentine, The Montclair Kimberley Academy, NJ

The New York Times Magazine, September 2011[Schooling the Neighbors](#)*The Gringo Next Door*, directed by Habib Yazdi and Javier Pabon

This film explores the miscommunication between two neighbors in large part due to the cultural differences (or perceived differences) between their families. Perfect for an icebreaker activity at a diversity event, this film touches on stereotypes and misconceptions about Mexican Americans. Independent filmmakers Habib Yazdi and Javier Pabon use humor to identify cultural barriers between a Mexican family and its white neighbor. From cooking dinner to talking to children about relationships, this short fifteen-minute film manages to capture the essence of many Americans' perceptions of each other. The filmmakers debuted this film at the Latin American Film Festival in Durham, North Carolina. Clips from the film can be found at the link above. For copies of the film, those who are interested should email the filmmaker at habib@hueismpictures.com

Toni Graves Williamson, Abington Friends School, PA

Hueism Pictures, 2009[MAGAZINE](#)[Complementary Wiring](#)*How Khan Academic is Changing the Rules of Education*, by Clive Thompson

In this incisive and balanced article in *WIRED* magazine, Clive Thompson profiles Salman Khan and his on-line academy, which appeals to many educators as a way to create truly individualized instruction for students, especially in the larger classrooms of public schools. Khan's nonprofit group has developed partnerships with individual teachers in public school classrooms, and the results seem incredibly promising. Not only are the students working at their own pace, but their teachers can also collect feedback about the topics and skills that give students trouble and follow up with sessions to reinforce these concepts to students individually or in small groups. The on-line process can serve, then, as teacher's aid and electronic litmus test. Thompson gives voice to Khan's critics as well, many of whom affiliate themselves with constructivism. These skeptics believe that Khan's pedagogy is simply more "drill and kill" and actually impedes deep understanding. As independent schools grapple with the coming challenge of on-line education, the article is a terrific introduction both to Khan and the debate surrounding the use of this blossoming form of educational technology.

Stephanie Lipkowitz, Albuquerque Academy, New Mexico

Wired Magazine, August 2011

BOOKS

[Spatial Intelligence](#)*The Third Teacher: 79 Ways You Can use Design to Transform Teaching and Learning*, by OWP/P Inc., VS Furniture, and Bruce Mau Design

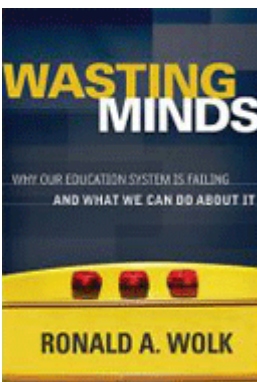
Since the 40s when Malaguzzi named the environment as the Third teacher, third to adults and peers, there have been debates about which spaces, tools and furniture are most conducive to learning. Over decades, minimalists, OCD therapists, religious educators and luminaries such as Howard Gardner have had their say. In this visually vibrant volume, the educators and those who collaborated to assemble it display actual examples of their efforts and speak to their experiences with real children and real places. Color, sound, terrain, textures, external spaces and building interiors are considered as part of the learning team. From Sir Ken Robinson to Chef Ann Cooper, from Canada to Germany, from the Caymans to South Africa, eight chapters illustrate the concerns and actions of people dedicated to the examining the role of environment in the education of all children. This book is unorthodox in appearance, never dull, and full of creative and exciting ideas.

Margaret Bleyberg, Hillel Academy, Kingston, Jamaica

Abrams, 2010[A Refreshing Memoir about Attention Deficit](#)*Buzz: A Year of Paying Attention*, by Katherine Ellison

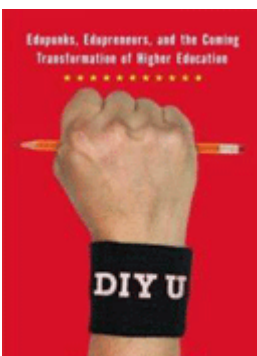
When Katherine Ellison's son, Buzz, entered seventh grade, both of them were diagnosed with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Ellison, a Pulitzer-Prize winning investigative journalist, spent the following year reconnecting with her son, trying to understand her own brain chemistry and researching the bewildering array of treatments among which parents must choose. The account of that year of study and struggle is narrated in this moving, funny, and informative memoir. The tale of Ellison's year of "paying attention" evokes tremendous empathy both for Buzz and his exhausted parents, but it is also deeply informative about the ways that teachers and schools can be more supportive of students with ADHD. Ellison ends her memoir with a balanced and well-researched outline of the different treatments available, which could prove useful to parents seeking a starting point as they look to create the right set of supports for their child.

Stephanie Lipkowitz, Albuquerque Academy, NM

Hyperion, 2010[Customizing Schools](#)*Wasting Minds: Why Our Education System Is Failing and What We Can Do About It*, by Ronald Wolk

Billions of tax dollars are spent on attempts to improve public schools. Drawing on wisdom gleaned from decades of reporting on school reform as founder and former editor of *Education Week*, author Ron Wolk argues that we should stop tinkering with school improvements. Instead, he argues for redesigning schools to meet the needs and challenges of a new century by personalizing education and offering more charter school options. His reasons for redesign hold true for private schools as well. Students learn in different ways and paces; they increasingly have different talents, problems and different cultural backgrounds. Small, innovative schools that emphasize real world learning, rigorous performance-based assessments and teachers who serve as advisors and instructional guides are much more responsive to this reality. Sections of the book describe learning (Chapters 11-14) that does away with academic requirements, allowing high school students to choose from multiple pathways such as virtual learning or community based projects with authentic assessment, giving new application to newer practices in independent schools, particularly for educators who want to make community service more relevant.

Pearl Rock Kane, Klingenstein Center, NY

Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development, 2011[Supplanting the Value of a College Degree?](#)*DIY U: Edupunks, Edupreneurs, and the Coming Transformation of Higher Education*, by Anya Kamenetz

DIY U reads like a higher education version of *The World is Flat*. Kamenetz provides a history of the development of our current university model, makes a compelling case for the fact that this model is no longer an effective or efficient way to meet the exponential growth in demand for higher education, and then outlines a series of possible future models for meeting this demand. These models range from tinkering with aspects of the current design of a college education to radically different modes of learning that leverage our ability to instantaneously access high-quality information on the Internet. DIY U provides a very useful backdrop for independent school educators who are trying to make sense of what type of "21st Century Skills" students will need to live fulfilling and successful adult lives.

Chris Lauricella, The Park School, Buffalo, NY

Chelsea Green Publishing, April 2010

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